Continental Board of Counsellors in Asia

May 10, 2007

International Teaching Centre
Baha'i World Centre

Dearly loved Teaching Centre.

I would like to share with your august institution some updates on the development of the Faith in Taiwan as well as certain observations made during past year as well as at the most recent National Convention. I would like seek your guidance. Intervention from the World Centre seems to be needed now to prevent further damage infringed on the best interest of the Faith in this country.

Background:

Upon receiving the advice delivered by one of the members of the Teaching Centre after the submission of my report (late 2005) on the similar subject, I did not approach the National Assembly for meeting since. Neither was any Counsellor member from the Board invited to join me in meeting with Assembly. During past one and a half year, only on two occasions that the Assembly requested for consultation. One was on the subject of their being assigned with an international financial collaboration goal, and the other was to have a joint consultation in last January with the newly appointed Auxiliary Board members after their appointment announcement.

In order that potential quality human resource can be better used in the field of current emphasis, Ms. Clare Wu, then a member of the Assembly was appointed to the Auxiliary Board last November. The vacancy was filled by Mrs. Hsiao Shwei Lin, a member from one advanced cluster Changhua (C3) and the key person to form

the first study circle which was mentioned in a story appeared on the Reflection of Growth #8. She was the one who introduced and streamlines the initial action of forming study circle and other core activities in the cluster, and since then, has been a sincere, focused and hard-working collaborator of the Auxiliary Board member serving in the area on their institute process.

The Assembly continues to follow its practice of visiting major Local Assemblies and now offers deepening classes conducted by its Assembly members particularly to those who entered the Faith through institute process including the cluster of Changhua whose Local Assembly was only formed in 2007 The Assembly is also in the process of developing a manual to train Local Assemblies and has assigned the task to Dr. Danesh Sham. In the mean time, a handful of pioneers residing in the central area, who are not involved in the process, continue to influence the newly enrolled believers the need to be deepened through deepening classes either offered by themselves or by the National Assembly members, While pioneers supported one particular visitor (native Taiwanese residing abroad but not in the process) and emphasized the need of deepening classes, the Auxiliary Board members serving in the area exercises their restraints and wisdom striving to remind the friends avoid distractions as much as possible, but certainly decisions of local and national institutions prevailed.

Training Institute & National Coordinator:

To revitalize and accelerate the institute process, the national institute coordinator Mrs. Josie Chung has deployed strategies already proven to be effective from experiences with vigor and focusing on five goal clusters, namely, Taipei city & county (N2), Taichung city & county (C2), Changhua city county (C3), Nantou city & county (C4), Taitung city & county (E3), and a couple of other clusters where visible human resource still remain worth working with. Following table gives a glimpse of reshaping human resource pyramid in past seven years.

B.E.	Book1	Book2	Book3	Book4	Book5	Book6	Book7
156	77	29	0	0	0	0	0
157	132	94	14	0	0	0	0
158	195	144	71	37	0	33	33
159	285	197	132	87	0	62	55
160	324	213	153	98	0	73	57
161	379	233	169	125	0	88	59
162	446	275	211	152	0	106	85
163	558	338	262	191	0	146	117

Majority of the graduates are from five goal clusters. Although by number, the size of cluster C3 is not the largest among the five, its mobilization of Book 7 has always been the highest (more than 50%) and is increasing due to their keenness in learning to be effective tutors through their own vigorous efforts The mobilization of other goal clusters are between 20-30%.

Cluster	Book1	Book2	Book3	Book4	Book5	Book6	Book7
N2	42	25	16	13	0	12	10
C2	94	61	56	43	0	36	31
C3	83	45	41	29	0	26	19
C4	82	58	45	33	0	24	16
E3	65	40	26	17	0	11	9
Sub-total	366	229	184	135	0	109	85
v.s. Total	65%	67%	70%	71%	0	74%	72%

Annual incremental (as indicates below) in past one year has reached a new high level compared with all previous years. Total number of people completing institute courses has reached 337 (last column, below table), almost triple of the figure three years ago. Among this number, 110 was produced alone by cluster C3, 90 from cluster C2 and 34 each from cluster N2 and C4 (details also see attached PPT file, third slide). Though number generated from cluster E3 was small (13) and though this cluster has almost lost its

vigor as too much was shouldered by Auxiliary Board member alone, however, a small group of tutors has been revitalized in past year through tutor up-grading program provided by the national institute coordinator and Auxiliary Board member serving the area. Thus, E3 cluster now holds great potential of its future growth. Most hopeful to achieve first hurdle of launching IPG would be C3, most likely within 163 BE and then C2 should follow soon if distractions from existing elements as described below can be reduced or removed.

The shape of human resource pyramid in incremental has reached a better proportion (see attached PPT file, first slide) due to the hard work of the Institute Board and tireless efforts of its national coordinator and one of her close associates of the Board, as well as those tutors in cluster level who experienced their own growth while involved themselves in the process and valued their own learning form the process

B.E.	Book 1	Book 2	Book 3	Book 4	Book 5	Book6	Book7	Total
156	77	6	0	0	0	0	0	83
157	55	65	14	0	0	0	0	134
158	63	50	57	37	0	3	33	243
159	90	53	61	50	0	29	22	305
160	40	34	21	11	0	11	2	119
161	55	20	16	27	0	15	2	135
162	69	42	42	27	0	15	2	197
163	112	63	51	39	0	40	32	337

As number of book 1 graduate is a good indicator to measure level of effort in teaching and outward reaching orientation, it is obvious to see the most advanced cluster C3 leads the way in this endeavor. The most significant increase of Book 1 graduates was from cluster Changhua (C3), 37% with total of 41 graduates. Ranking second was cluster Taichung (C2), which is adjacent to Changhua cluster, 27% with total of 24 graduates. Among these five goal clusters, they produced 81% of total Book 1 (91 graduates) during last

years. Details see the second slide of the attached PPT file.

The implementation of well-defined strategies already proven effective for cluster B and C with re-sharpening focus was the key to increasing success of the human resource development. it is now crystal clear that this indispensable instrument has earned its institutional capacity with a solid ground. While challenges are still many ahead of its further development, focus, confident and fearless are those qualities which testify another yet milestone this Institute is designated to realize.

Regardless the clarifications made over time in the past years on the autonomous status of the Institute Board and the function of its national coordinator, the National Assembly, through its officer bearers, particularly the Treasurer, continues to treat the Board like a national committee and the national coordinator its employee. From the email c.c. copies shared by the national institute coordinator, I noticed that virtually, every single request made by the coordinator was questioned by the Treasurer, from requesting fund for printing institute books, hiring an office assistant within the budget limit, to asking replenishment of monthly petty cash. Worse than this, through the Treasurer, somehow, the Assembly develops an impression that the bookkeeping maintained by the national coordinator was a mess though its simple system preexisted long before the current coordinator took over the responsibility from its former coordinator who was one of National Assembly member. Thee entire operational expense of the Institute was only 2% in NTD66,000 (USD2,000) of the national spending, yet, storms in teacup were created constantly. Clarification and explanation made by the national coordinator on the matter that the Institute Board has never paid anyone to tutor institute courses was not accepted by the Treasurer and the entire Assembly takes on that stand replying from its Secretary to the institute coordinator saying “whatever the officer of the Assembly states, it counts” and it refused to even listen the clarification given by the national coordinator at all. Again, should the bookkeeping was inadequate, from the report of the national institute coordinator, never has any specific suggestion

and guidance been given by the Treasurer to the coordinator to fix or adjust its accounting procedural deficiency.

It is unfortunate that the Assembly does not regard, in pursuing its national plan, a national institute coordinator is its primary collaborator and value such a person who is also an experienced Auxiliary Board member and the most effective coordinator it has ever had since the Institute Board formed A possible reason for this could be that the current Treasurer once had a high hope wishing to become a national institute coordinator, and had expressed such wish to a visiting member of the Teaching Centre in 2004 (prior to such time, in almost one year, there was either part-time National Coordinator or none after the former Coordinator left the office) and myself. We both did not see the person fits in the position though said nothing to this friend. However, it can also be the National Assembly is unable to represent a truth-seeking and just institution of the Faith. Evidences are as follow

National Convention:

Among 38 delegates, 33 were presented at the Convention, eight among them only came on the second day. About 20 +/- of them are not involved in the instate process, and 9 of them are non Chinese-speaking friends. Six out of nine outgoing National Assembly members are delegates. Three Auxiliary Board members and around 15 plus of other friends also attended the event. No simultaneous translation was provided and Convention was conducted virtually in two languages, a situation which could be described as a degeneration of institutional capacity.

The consultation focused very much on the current framework for actions. The presentation of the Institute Board indicated a great improvement of the institute process which produced 112 new Book 1 graduates in past year. The reflections of those who are engaged in the institute process are testimonies of what the House described what transformed individual through the process. They are focus on well-defined lines of action and their level of confidence and commitment to the Plan are phenomenon, a wonder

which has never been experienced in the history of the Faith in Taiwan. Particularly those who entered the process and then became its human resource in past 2-3 years are really the committed active supporters now the system can depend on. They are the major portion of those tutors who generated such significant result of having tutored 337 people in the institute courses, and all of them have been collaborating with National Institute Coordinator excellently. However, confusion continued to emerge in terms of what could be viewed as distractions and what focus means by the expression of the House of Justice in its December 27, 2005 message. Particularly unclear of such a subject are those who do not engaged in the institute process, members of the institutions, either local or national, as well as those who are pioneers.

One factor which contributes to such a confusion came from what the National Assembly has been trying to "counterbalance": the efforts made by the training institute and members of the Institution of the Counsellors focusing on the two essential movements, either intentionally or unintentionally. The Assembly feels that the friends who are not engaged in the institute process, or core activities should also be mobilized to do whatever they would like to do and the Assembly should provide such opportunities, otherwise, the Assembly feels it would discriminate those friends and cause disunity. Another belief of the Assembly was that the current institute training will not train Local Assembly members, and is not enough to deepen Baha'is. The Assembly, therefore decided to develop a LSA training manual by one of its members whose conceptual framework of the current global pursuit has been proven poor, and his belief of how the Faith should operate is rigid in an old mode of thinking, yet, he himself and some other see him as a Baha'i scholar. The program has been delayed but it will eventually come into being to create more distraction (NSA minutes #578-40-December 2006).

From the most recent Feast letter (see attached file), it seems the issue of focus was better understood by the National Assembly after the Convention. It will worth watching for any fundamental

change of attitude and action as certain decision made by the Assembly (see below section under National Spiritual Assembly) remains questionable.

There was one change of the Assembly membership this year. Mrs. Ya Ling Guo from cluster C3 was elected to replace Mrs. Hsaio Shwei Lin who resides in cluster C4 but all of her business and daily activities take place in cluster C3. Although she only served on the Assembly for four months to fill a vacancy left from one member who was appointed to the Auxiliary Board last November 2006, what she shared with me after the Convention was quite alarming in terms of how National Assembly functions, and confirmed once again, some observations which will be addressed under the subject of National Spiritual Assembly below.

During the Convention, the delegates from cluster C3 felt that they were somehow ignored or discriminated by some members of the National Assembly which did not view their achievement in institute process was something special. The Assembly gave special importance to a Taiwanese Baha'i friend's personal experience in her pioneering post inside China. Indeed, a couple of Assembly members present at the Convention did not see, or chose not to recognize the same dynamic force which transformed Changhua cluster. They instead glorify the experiences shared by that Taiwanese friend pioneering in China. When national budget proposal was reviewed, contribution to the Baha'i Fund from cluster Changhua was not indicated on the list although there were contributions. While either Local Assemblies or groups were listed (Changhua established its Local Assembly on Ridvan 2007), Changhua was not included. In private, Mrs Hsiao Shwei Lin, asked the Treasurer about the data of Changhua, contribution, she was denied information and was told, surprisingly, that Auxiliary Board member did not submit any information to the Assembly. Later on, when Mrs. Ya Ling Guo, then, a newly elected Assembly member, asked the Treasurer for the same information, she was first denied and later was told by the Treasurer that she will have to ask Dr. Danesh Sham (who is not a office bearer) about the matter and the Assembly will have to decide how the information should be

presented to her. Both Lin and Guo felt being alienated and were puzzled about the reply they received and shared their concern with the Auxiliary Board members after Convention was over. They felt that their presence at the Convention was not welcome by some members of the Assembly, and they were discriminated because they do not have equal right as other Assembly members do, simply because they are from cluster Changhua and closely associated with the Auxiliary Board members serving in the area.

When National Assembly assigned number of delegate in 162BE, Changhua cluster (C3) was combined with cluster Nantou (C4) and five delegates were allocated. What happened was that five delegates elected at that time were all from Changhua cluster. This year (163BE), the National Assembly separated Changhua and Nantou into two electoral units and allocated two delegates for Changhua and five delegates for Nantou. Though it justifies such allocation of delegates based on number of existing believers in these two clusters, the intention of the Assembly to reduce the presence of Changhua cluster was obvious. It was evident at the Convention, the need for change was strong, however, majority of the vocal delegates are old friends and not in the institute process

National Spiritual Assembly and its members:

During the joint consultation in last January as mentioned in the background, the Assembly explicitly expressed that it does not wish to study December 27, 2005 message from the House of Justice saying study of Messages has already taken too much time. As a result, no joint study of such message has ever been arranged between two Arms since the message was released.

Some highlight of the expressions made by members of the Assembly:

- The members of the Institution of the Counsellors continue to pursue different line of action opposite to that of the National Assembly does. It seems we have two different goals.

- The Counsellor has built a wall between the National Assembly and the community. The Counsellor continues to say things or making “announcement” without Assembly’s sanction.
- There were only a couple of clusters which experienced success in the institute process, the rest has failed. We have lost the closeness we enjoyed in the community. (This member was expressing her disappointment of receiving no phone call or care from Baha’i friends when her husband fell ill.) Ironically, however, the person did not see her neighborhood community is emerging from those who have been joining her for study circle and they did call and visit the couple.
- Auxiliary Board members are “directing” people’s life and when they gave advice to the friends, they did not tell the friends that they should also seek guidance from Local Spiritual Assemblies. The Assembly then requested that the Auxiliary Board members, besides counselling, should tell the friends to seek advice from the Assemblies.
- A couple of members expressed that they feel vulnerable and hurt as they do not receive the respect from those new believers.
- The Auxiliary Board members have given wrong advice to the friends in local communities, such as LSA meeting is not important, giving to the Fund is not important, etc.
- One member expressed emotionally, probably by accident, mentioned that the one absent member (Dr. Danesh Sham) has simply given up to come and join such a meeting because the wrong doing of the members of the Institution of the Counsellors.

While it was difficult to imagine the foundation from which above mindset was formed, as much as humanly possible, clarifications were made to impress the Assembly that the members of the Institution of the Counsellors have no separate agenda or having a different Plan. Our plan is National Assembly’s plan indeed, and if there are wrong doing of the members, we will be grateful to receive the guidance of the Assembly. During the meeting, I

pleaded the Assembly to see what all Auxiliary Board members have been doing are guarded within the framework of the Plan designated by the House, and even if it was true that Auxiliary Board members were directing life of the believers, was there any case that believers were diverted to engage a set of activities which not desirable to the wishes of the House of Justice? On the contrary, their sense of direction was guarded by the well-defined framework of the current Plan itself. However, it is hardly a surprise to see such mindset should continue to exist because poor quality of its consultation, plus the domination and manipulation of a few strong personality and the weak mind of those who simply cannot differentiate individual matters from institutional issues

I was told by Mrs. Lin that the Assembly consults mostly in English though seven of them are natives with Chinese as their mother tongue and two members (Mrs. Hsiao Shwei Lin and Ms. Miao Hsin Chou) from Changhua area are not even equipped with basic English skill either verbally or in writing. Yet, email communications among NSA members are very much in English When I asked Mrs. Lin about the flow of consultation, she expressed to me that both she and Ms. Chou feel like they are “extra members” because the language used in consultation, as well as difficulty they experienced in changing the course of direction; simply because there was always a united voice among six of Assembly members. Mrs. Lin has also shared with me that the deep rooted prejudices, or misunderstanding on Auxiliary Board members and Counsellor which some of the Assembly members have. It caused pains in her heart to see such injustice as she new how and what Auxiliary Board members are doing in her cluster but neither could she fathom nor clarify the issue due to jealousy and blindness of the mind of some members.

From a casual expression of the office assistant working at the National Office to one Auxiliary Board member, the Secretary, Mr. Thomas Lee, spent much of his office hours doing translation for two Assembly members who do not read Chinese. The National Assembly’s minutes states that there really isn’t enough work for two staff (one full-time office assistant and one part-time staff)

besides a full-time paid Secretary, yet 45% (USD43,300) of annual National Assembly budget continued to be allocated for such an office operation. While stipend paid to the Secretary was highest among all (about USD22,000 annually), yet, the Secretary feels he has been underpaid based on the opinion of his family members (the reason cited in item #11 NSA minutes #578-40-December 2006 was not clearly stated). While there is no doubt of Mr. Lee's devotion for the Faith, his employment has made him submissive to the authorities in order not to lose his job and being defensive when decisions of the Assembly contradicts its own policy. Often times, he dares not state what is National Assembly's existing policy or latest decision and would reply that Assembly needs to consult further. Details related to matters which the Assembly did not specifically decide then cannot be mentioned by its officers. There were just too many of such incidents of distorted understanding, it is worth to mention one most recent case experienced by one Auxiliary Board member regarding the goal clusters to establish IPG within the Five Year Plan. Because the Assembly did not decided on it, even though it is clear that all the goals were submitted from the clusters themselves after institutional meeting, then, no one should say which five specific clusters are goal clusters. Such a narrow minded application of not deviating Assembly's decision is stifling the spirit of the believers.

The over-all "control" or self-imposed constraint on Assembly member to express oneself has inhibited consultation, reflection and new understanding gained from the guidance given by the House of Justice. This situation as mentioned in my late 2005 report has never really changed. To a degree, it even seems to be obvious that the rigid understanding of a few in regard with how the Faith should conduct its affairs even get worse.

There are inconsistency in the policy and decisions of the National Assembly. There is a need for a good retrieval system and better quality control of guarding decision making process. This, the current secretary is not competent to do. The culture within the Assembly makes frank consultation difficult if not impossible. The dominating personality finds other members with weak mind,

befriend them to form “allied” relationship under the impression of having unity in a united team. Different views would then be seen as a “betray” of the ally. No one is dare to bring up issues related to absent members at their consultation, or blindly accept what has been presented by the person. In addition, a collective force extends to exercise their common view when consulting with others. During last January joint meeting with the Auxiliary Board members, though Dr. Danesh Sham was not present, it was not difficult to observe that many spoke for his view.

The Treasurer of the Assembly, Ms. Pei Hua Lin has been facing personal financial difficulties due to credit card loan. In order to reduce high interest rate imposed on the scheme set by the bank, she borrowed money from private loan shark and in the end accumulated more debts resulted from a hoax. She then turned to borrow money from following individuals, as far as I come to know, - one Auxiliary Board member, the sister of another Auxiliary Board member, the newly elected NSA member, Mrs. Ya Ling Guo, and a long time Baha’i woman in Changhua county. The amount she asked from those individuals was basically NT$100,000 but would accept whatever one can afford to. She told variations of her stories to those Baha’i friends. When she was confronted, she revealed the truth even how much such truth is in reality could still be questionable, and the friends came to realize it will be very difficult, if not impossible, to have their money back within the length of time they were originally promised. The entire debt I now come to know is approximately NT$3,500,000 (USD106,000) or maybe more. It was reported by the Auxiliary Board member that the Secretary of National Assembly also asked other friends to lend money to Ms. Pei Hua Lin, but exactly how many friends were approached and how much amounts actually involved was not clear. In view of her current role as a National Treasurer, I have a concern of the safeguard of the National Fund under her custodianship though there isn’t any evidence to sustain such a speculation, at least a small group of people do not think her as truthful. Under the current situation within the Assembly, there is a serious doubt that such matter would even be brought to the consultative chamber.

As objective as possible, I pray that above description does not deviate from the critical condition which exists within the Assembly. It is eating away the capacity of the Assembly in seeking truth and protecting the best interest of the Faith. This important institution of the Faith has lost its ability to self-examine and have frank and open consultation. The self-righteous individuals overpower the weak mind and manipulate the process as a personal tool to direct the course of the Assembly in their own favor. It is under such a climate, the national newsletter was edited according to one person's interest and favor and sometime the jokes appeared on it were not even appropriated for a Baha'i publication. The Feast letters and Treasurer's letters are basically composed as story-telling vehicles in past years with little or without linking to the current framework of actions. It is evident in the minutes under the subject of "Meeting with Mr. Ardeshir Mazloum" who questioned the Assembly indulgence in promoting institutional authority and leadership (NSA minutes #580-40-February 2007). This is not just a view from Mr. Mazloum alone.

Recommendations:

- **The Assembly should be seriously warned:**

It is evident now the Assembly has shifted its prejudice and animosity from Auxiliary Board members to those sincere and hardworking friends in the cluster C3, and it was not just because the signs to which such concern had already been spotted at recent Convention toward the delegates from cluster C3, it has existed within the Assembly for a while. What is more poisoning is that the Assembly could not stop a few of its individual members from causing such trouble. I am therefore compelled to recommend that the Assembly should be warned and free the shackle of wanting to control and direct the affairs of the Faith in according to the views of a few confused members.

- **Reduce the number of delegate:**

For long term solution, certainly, the mode of operation can only be

changed when new bloods are elected to the Assembly, but time is critical as more and more advanced clusters emerging from the grass-root and may not have the luxury to wait for such a chance to come. In the mean time, it has become very difficult for the Auxiliary Board members to justify a way to comfort those sincere and new souls when they themselves fell prey to the injustice from the supreme institution in the country. Whatever is the case, the current allocation of delegates in 38 are too many, a reduction will be desirable.

- **Removal of certain Assembly members:**

Should situation remains unchanged or, God forbid, become even worse after a warning is being given, it will be necessary that the Assembly be dissolved and an Administrative Committee be appointed while membership of the Assembly can remain the same as registered in the government to secure its legal status. If this is not desirable by the Supreme Body, at least certain Assembly members should be removed. Names to be considered will be those who have no willingness to change, or are blind to see the need to change, or are core members of its allied-forming mindset, or are even arrogant to the eyes of the community. Mr. Thomas Lee, Ms. Jing Yi Lin, Ms. Pei Hua Lin and Dr. Danesh Sham are better to let go.

Having reported this, it is with an ardent hope that a fair situation was presented while realizing my own weaknesses and limited capacity. The initial accomplishment made by handful of those devoted and focused vanguards of the Faith in the field of expansion and consolidation, though still humble and insignificant in its size and experiences, was, in most of cases, personal testimonies to respond the global spiritual enterprise designated by the Supreme Body. The convictions now took rooted in those dear friends are firm and unshakable, yet the institute system as well as those small bands of staunch active supporters who have seen the light and grasped its essence and gladly pursue their personal endeavors need so much to be protected from the deficiency and malfunction of an institution to which they pledge royalty, submit

their obedience and follow its command. The point we have reached is whether such growing pains are still necessary, or it is time to stop internal bleeding.

I beseech your guidance on all the matters involved, as always.

With loving greetings,

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